HISTORIC FARMSTEADS: A SUMMARY OF WORK BY ENGLISH HERITAGE

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Policy and guidance at a national level has for more than a decade developed the need for a sound evidence base, based on knowledge and an integrated understanding of the environmental, social and economic characteristics within an area. Sustainable development is achievable within the context of historic farmsteads, but approaches to new use need to both set within a structured framework and tailored to the distinctiveness and character of individual locales. There are three key questions that must be addressed:

1. What is the capacity for change of farmsteads and their associated landscapes and buildings?
2. How do we meet the common objective, as defined in national policy and guidance, of sustaining the character and local distinctiveness of areas and landscapes?
3. What is the capacity for change at a strategic as well as a site-based level?

Characterisation has developed in response to the need to manage and inform change at a strategic scale above that of individually designated sites and structures. This has been based on the mapping of distinct areas and types of landscape, the result being the 159 national Countryside Character Areas (which are now used as the targeting framework for the agri-environment schemes) and the Landscape Character Assessments developed by local authorities. Since then, Historic Landscape Characterisation, as developed by English Heritage in partnership with county councils, has contributed towards an understanding of the long process of change and creation that has shaped the landscape. It is an important facet of characterisation that it recognises a seamless progression from historic to future change, a perspective that helps to ensure that new development and regeneration can benefit most effectively from the lessons and opportunities of the past. Until recently, however, it has been difficult to see how the built environment – which obviously operates at a lower scale than that of landscapes – can be seen as part of this process.

The Historic Farmsteads: Audit and Evaluation project, commissioned from the University of Gloucestershire by English Heritage and the Countryside Agency (Historic Farm Buildings. Constructing the Evidence Base) provided a valuable insight into the character of the listed resource, the pressures driving upon it and the effectiveness of current policy. It has found that the majority of Regional and Local Planning Guidance, whilst addressing the issue of reuse, reflects limited knowledge of the nature and character of historic farmsteads, whether at a local scale or in their broader context. Limited knowledge of historic farmsteads in their broader context, and the lack of a consistent framework for understanding and valuing farmsteads and their buildings, was identified as the greatest obstacle to:

1. informing clear and transparent decision-making at a local scale;
2. informing determination of the most appropriate options for reuse;
3. identifying issues at the earliest possible stage relating to the impact of development on significance and character – pre-application discussion being a critical factor in progressing and determining planning applications;
4. the development of local plan policies for rural buildings that work from broad principles to detail;
5. informing consistent and evidence-based tools for use in development control and listed building consent;
6. the development of place-specific guidance based on character and context, as recommended in national planning policy (PPS1, 7 and 12); the need for this has
more recently been reinforced by DCLG’s, *Guidance on changes to the development control system*, effective from August 2006, and related guidance by CABE.

7. the targeting of resources, including through the Higher Level Agri-Environment Schemes;

8. making the built environment part of the more integrated approaches to land management that are developing.

Solutions must, therefore, take account of regional and local diversity and circumstances - differences in patterns of settlement, redundancy, dereliction and conversion, and in farmstead and building character - and the implications this has in terms of strategies for re-use. These considerations have informed the recommendations for action made in the recently published joint English Heritage and Natural England policy on farm buildings, *Living buildings in a living landscape: finding a future for traditional farm buildings*, which are that we must:

- promote positive means of managing change which align an understanding of the characteristics of historic farmsteads with their potential for and sensitivity to change, at the building, farmstead and landscape scale;
- avoid standard ‘off-the-peg’ solutions that do not take account of regional and local diversity and circumstances. There should be more emphasis on the quality of design, both traditional and contemporary, including appropriate detailing, materials, craftsmanship and the setting of buildings.
- inform appropriate development through considering buildings as part of their wider landscapes, and within their regional and local context;
- design and demonstrate character-based evaluations of the farm building stock as a positive tool for land-use planning and environmental management.

As a first step in this process *Preliminary Regional Character Statements* have been written as a sourced synthesis of information, drawing together information that will enable the farmsteads of each region to be better understood within the national context of farmstead and agricultural development, and their surrounding fields and settlements. They include summaries outlining the development of each of the 159 Joint Character Areas in England. Pilot work in Hampshire, Sussex and the High Weald has also demonstrated that we can usefully bring together what we know about farmsteads, and through rapid mapping demonstrate the link between historically conditioned landscape character and type and their survival, dates and types. To supplement this work, English Heritage has also published *The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: a Guide to Good Practice*, which is intended to help individuals and local authorities make better and more informed decisions about the future use of farm buildings and their capacity for change both as buildings and within their landscape context. High standards in design and implementation are promoted where conversion is considered as a viable and appropriate option, and an assessment framework is included to help inform pre-application discussion and the decision-making process.

*A Toolkit for Sustainable Development of Farmsteads* is now seeking to deliver three key products:

An assessment framework, that comprises an Options Appraisal for land managers and a Pre-Application checklist for applicants. This uses a similarly structured framework for informing landscape-scale or site-based solutions. It does this by aligning an understanding of the character of the farmstead, its landscape setting and individual structures against its significance and sensitivity to change.
A Design Framework which outlines the key characteristics of farmsteads and their buildings, and explains how this can inform good practice.

A web-based product, now at pilot stage, which is being devised as single-stop shop that can be applied at a variety of scales and for a variety of uses. It is experimenting with the delivery of character statements on individual areas, linked to contextual overviews, a hyper-linked glossary, and guidance on best practice in conversion, repair, useful links to other web sites etc.

An early version of this toolkit, and of character-based guidance, has appeared in Basingstoke and Deane’s SPD on Diversification and Reuse.
Sources
For an early report on the Hampshire pilot project, see:
http://wwwlandscapecharacterorg.uk


See English Heritage’s HELM website, under Regeneration and Design, Rural Development (http://wwwhelmorg.uk/server/shownav9495) for links to the project reports cited above.

For characterisation as developed by English Heritage, see www.changeandcreationorg and wwwenglish-heritageorg.ukcharacterisation.

For the Basingstoke and Deane SPD, adopted in June 2007, see:
http://wwwbasingstokegovuk/planning/localplanspdfarm+Diversification+and+Traditional+F armsteads+SPD.htm

This will appear in fully illustrated form later this year.
WEB-BASED TOOLKIT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF FARMSTEADS:
INTRODUCTION AND USER GUIDE TO PILOT PRODUCT

1 Introduction
This pilot stage toolkit has been developed with £5000 of funding from the Hampshire Rural Pathfinder Programme. It represents an initial stage in the development of a web-based structured framework for informing change and the targeting of resources, that is applicable at a national scale and is cheap to produce, amend and update. At this early stage, sufficient is developed in outline form for the user to gain an understanding of its potential and provide comments on its structure and the format/length of text and illustrations. The stress is on the South East of England, as that is where mapping work at a local level has been developed. Further to consultation, it will be refined and further developed in outline form as a national database. The link to the website is:

http://www.fatfreedesign.co.uk/test_folder/english_heritage/tk_splash.html

2 Background
There is a need to align an understanding of the characteristics of historic farmsteads with their potential for and sensitivity to change, tailored to the distinctiveness and character of individual locales and understanding them as part of their broader regional and national context. Recent work (see Annexe) and consultation with key stakeholders has highlighted the need to develop the evidence base and place farmsteads within their broader landscape and settlement context. Limited knowledge of historic farmsteads in their broader context, however, has been identified as the greatest obstacle to:

9 the development of evidence-based and character-based guidance, as recommended in national planning guidance;
10 the targeting of resources;
11 understanding the impact of proposals for reuse;
12 informing the preparation of applications and pre-application discussion;
13 making the built environment part of the more integrated approaches to rural delivery that are developing.

This toolkit is being devised as single-stop shop that can be applied at a variety of scales and for a variety of uses. It aims to:

- Define local distinctiveness within a structured framework through the delivery of character statements on individual areas, linked to their regional and national context. These will help the reader to identify key farmstead and building types in their landscape context, and will be linked to a glossary of terms, enabling the user to understand themes and building/farmstead types in further detail.
- Link this understanding to an assessment framework, that comprises a similarly structured framework for informing landscape-scale or site-based solutions, linked to guidance on best practice in conversion, repair, useful links to other web sites etc.

It is being designed for use by:

1 key players in the planning process (LA officers, architects, agents and applicants), in order to:
- inform the options for change;
• identify key issues and potential difficulties for discussion at the outset of a scheme;
• thereby save the resources of LAs, applicants and agents.

2 key players in the agri-environment schemes (Historic Environment Records, FWAG, farmers, landowners etc), in order to:
• identify key farmstead and building types in their landscape context.
• inform the targeting of agri-environment scheme grants
• inform Whole Farm Planning and integrated environmental management.

3 User Guide
Click on the first splash page to take you to the Home Page. The toolbar across the top outlines the main components of the Toolkit – National Context/Regional Context/Local Context/Glossary/Survey/Assessment Framework. Displayed to the right are the Regional Character Summaries, which provide links to the sourced and detailed Preliminary Regional Character Statements.

The Context sections (National, Regional and Local) are all structured in the same way, with headings as follows:
• Historical Development
• Landscape and Settlement
• Farmstead Types
• Building Types
• Building Materials

All of these headings can be search thematically or geographically. All have clear potential for development with maps, schematic illustrations and photographs, a selection of which have been provided as a ‘taster’ of what can be developed.

The section on Building Types under National Context is an introduction to the range of building types in the glossary, and the proposal is to have this hyper-linked in the final product. Only the historical development and timber framing sections are completed.

At present, only the South East has been developed as an illustrated region under Regional Context. The texts are based on the summary regional statements contained in the EH/Countryside Agency policy document, Living Buildings in a Living Landscape. Does the format of photographs work, or would a text-only page be better?

The Local Context section aims to describe farmsteads in the context of each of the 159 Countryside Character areas, and for the moment the user can click anywhere on the map to simulate zooming into a JCA of interest (the map will focus into JCA 130: Hampshire Downs). At the next stage of development, the intention is to provide a national map that can be examined at a finer scale, so that the user can place an individual site within its relevant character area.

The character area text has a summary of key characteristics at the front, and has two additional sections on Pressures and Research Questions. These have been completed in draft form and views are sought on their length and content. Views are also sought on the format of the document: it has been formatted in bullet points in response to feedback from key
stakeholders, who stressed the need for the document to be as simple as possible. Hotlinks can also be built from the text to the glossary of terms.

**Glossary**
Entries under letters A and B have thus far been completed. The quality of images can be improved. Does the format work?

**Survey**
This is intended as a guide to Survey and Assessment. It need to stress the need for a basic pre-application survey, that uses map regression and observation of the buildings to understand how the site has developed. It can be fully illustrated with photographs and drawings to illuminate the points that are made.

**Assessment Framework**
This will introduce the reader to the Assessment Framework and then provide links through to guidance on reuse and conversion, repair, designation criteria, the EH policy statement and web links to other web sites of interest such as the CLA Rural Buildings Awards Scheme.

**Regional Character Summaries**
The one for the South East has been developed. Is this the right format to adopt? Should there be a simple introduction to all the key characteristics of the region, or do the thumbnail illustrations for each key point work better?

**4 Future Directions**
Further to consultation, the database will be restructured and developed. This will include the completion of the Regional Character Summaries, the Glossary, the Survey section and the National Context sections. In order to keep costs to a minimum at this stage, the Local Context sections will then be developed so that the user can access an England map with a zoom capacity enabling drilling down to a sufficient level to determine the location of any site in relationship to its Character Area. A fully illustrated character statement can then be developed for one or two character areas per region, and the remainder entered in outline as Word and/or PDF documents.